

# Chinese Philosophy: Conceptions of the Good Life

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Office: Dodd 343

Time: TBD  
Place: TBD  
Office Hours: TBD

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

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This is a survey course of classical Chinese philosophy, which dates from roughly 550-220 BCE. We will devote most of our time to learning about the early Confucians (Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi) and Daoists (Laozi and Zhuangzi), but we will also set aside time to study Mohism and Legalism.

Our focus will be on the advice these thinkers give on how to live well. What does self-cultivation involve? How should one view one's own death and the death of loved ones? What import, if any, should one place on the role of tradition and ritual? In answering these (and other) questions, we will learn about the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical views held by early Chinese philosophers. But perhaps more importantly, we will ask if and how their views might guide our own ways of being in the modern world. In class discussions and written assignments, students will be encouraged to reflect on their own conceptions of the good life in light of the ideas encountered.

We will read a mix of primary and secondary sources. Although this is an advanced course, no prior knowledge in Chinese philosophy, language, or history is required.

## COURSE MATERIALS

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There is no required textbook for the course. All required and supplementary materials (including readings, reflections, and writing assignments) will be available through the course website.

Those looking for an introductory guide to the topics covered in this class are encouraged to check out the following textbooks:

- Graham, A. (1989). *Disputers of the Dao*.
- Liu, J. (2006). *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy: From Ancient Philosophy to Chinese Buddhism*.
- Van Norden, B. (2011). *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy*.

## ACCESSIBILITY & ACCOMODATIONS

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Any students seeking disability services should register with the [University's Center for Accessible Education \(CAE\)](#) as soon as possible. If you are already registered and require assistance for the quarter, please release your accommodation letters by the end of week one.

More generally, if you are experiencing difficulty (health-related, financial, other), please reach out to me. We will try to figure out how to best navigate the course under the circumstances.

## ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

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**Participation:** Participation will take many forms in this class, including the following: asking questions, answering questions, participating in discussions and in-class activities, coming to office hours, posting on the course discussion board, and responding to feedback on written assignments.

**Assignments:** This class features three kinds of assignments: in-class quizzes, papers, and peer feedback.

- In-class quizzes: Each week, there will be one short reading comprehension quiz during one of the two lectures. You will not know in advance which lecture will have the quiz (although if there's no quiz in the first lecture of the week, you'll know it's coming). These quizzes will be extremely easy if you have done the readings. They will be graded pass/fail. The idea is that these quizzes will encourage you both to stay on track with the reading schedule and to attend lecture.
- Reflections: You are required to submit five reflections during the term. In these assignments, you will be asked to reflect on the ideas we're learning about in light of your own lived experiences. More detailed instructions will be distributed separately.
- Papers: There will be three papers. These will grow in length as we move through the term. The first will be 2-3 pages, the second will be 3-4 pages, and the third will be 5-6 pages. Paper prompts and instructions will be released at least one week in advance of the deadline. Papers will be graded anonymously.
- Peer feedback: As part of the assignment for Paper Three, you will be required to write a draft of your paper in advance of the deadline. You will then exchange drafts with a peer and give them feedback on their paper. I will distribute a feedback form to help you structure your feedback. The goal is that you practice editing and develop a critical eye which you can then put towards your own written work.

**Grade Breakdown:** Final grades will be calculated as follows:

- Participation: 10%
- In-class quizzes: 10% (1% each)
- Reflections: 15% (3% each)
- Paper One: 10%
- Paper Two: 20%
- Paper Three: 30%
- Peer Feedback: 5%

**Late Policy:** All requests for 24-hour extensions on papers will be automatically granted (if received before the deadline). Papers that are turned in late will be docked 1/3 of a letter grade for each 48-hour period late. For example, a B will be lowered to a B- if the assignment is within 48 hours late.

## ACADEMIC HONESTY

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Students are expected to know and to follow the University's guidelines for academic honesty, available [here](#). Academic misconduct can occur in a variety of ways, including (but not limited to) cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism. Any suspected violation of university policy regarding academic conduct will be reported directly to the Office of the Dean of Students.

When in doubt about whether some academic practice is acceptable, ask the instructor for assistance. Always err on the side of avoiding academic misconduct.

## SCHEDULE

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This schedule is subject to change. Please regularly consult the course website for updates.

### Unit One: Confucianism

#### *Week One*

##### Lecture One: Introduction and Background

- Bryan Van Norden: "The historical context", *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2000) (pp. 1-17)
- Carine Defoort: "Is there such a thing as Chinese philosophy: Arguments of an implicit debate" (2001)

##### Lecture Two: Introducing Confucius

- Kongzi: "The Analects", *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2001) (pp. 1-55)
- Background reading (optional): Bryan Van Norden: "Kongzi and Confucianism" and "Kongzi and virtue ethics", *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2000) (pp. 18-50)

#### *Week Two*

##### Lecture One: Confucius on Propriety

- Stephen Angle: "Be filial" and "Following rituals", *Growing Moral: A Confucian Guide to Life* (2022) (pp. 25-45)
- Stephen Wilson: "Conformity, individuality, and the nature of virtue" (1995)

##### Lecture Two: Confucius on Self-Cultivation

- Philip Ivanhoe: "Kongzi ('Confucius')", *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation* (2000) (pp. 1-14)
- Hagop Sarkissian: "Confucius and the effortless life of virtue" (2010)

#### *Week Three*

##### Lecture One: Introducing Mencius

- Mengzi: "The Mengzi", *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2001) (pp. 111-153)
- Bryan Van Norden: "The second sage", *Aeon* (2016)
- Background reading (optional): Bryan Van Norden: "Mengzi and human nature", *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2000) (pp. 87-101)

#### Lecture Two: Mencius on Human Nature

- Philip Ivanhoe: “Mengzi (“Mencius”)”, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation* (2000) (pp. 15-28)

#### Week Four

##### Lecture One: Mencius on the Virtues

- Bryan Van Norden: “The virtue of righteousness in Mencius”, *Confucian Ethics: A Comparative Study of Self, Autonomy, and Community* (2004) (pp. 148-182)

##### Lecture Two: Introducing Xunzi

- Xunzi: “The Xunzi”, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2001) (pp. 247-294)
- Background reading (optional): Bryan Van Norden: “Xunzi’s Confucian naturalism”, *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2000) (pp. 164-185)

### ⇒ Paper One Due

#### Week Five

##### Lecture One: Xunzi on Human Nature

- Philip Ivanhoe: “Xunzi”, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation* (2000) (pp. 29-42)
- David Wong: “Early Confucian philosophy and the development of compassion” (2015)

### Unit Two: Mohism

##### Lecture Two: Introducing Mozi

- Mozi: “The Mozi”, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2001) (pp. 55-110)
- Background reading (optional): Bryan Van Norden: “Mohist consequentialism”, *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2000) (pp. 51-69)

#### Week Six

##### Lecture One: Mohist Impartial Caring

- Chris Fraser: “Inclusive care: For others as for oneself”, *The Philosophy of Mozi* (2016) (pp. 158-184)

### Unit Three: Daoism

##### Lecture Two: Introducing Laozi

- Laozi: “The Daodejing”, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2001) (pp. 157-200)
- Background reading (optional): Bryan Van Norden: “The *Daodejing* and mysticism”, *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2000) (pp. 122-141)

### ⇒ Paper Two Due

#### Week Seven

##### Lecture One: Laozi and *Wuwei* (Non-action)

- Edward Slingerland: “So-of-itself: Wu-wei in the *Laozi*”, *Effortless Action: Wu-wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China* (2003) (pp. 77-118)

Lecture Two: Introducing Zhuangzi

- Zhuangzi: “The Zhuangzi”, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2001) (pp. 203-246)
- Background reading (optional): Bryan Van Norden: “Zhuangzi’s therapeutic skepticism and relativism”, *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2000) (pp. 142-163)

*Week Eight*

Lecture One: Zhuangzi’s Skepticism

- Robert Eno: “Cook Ding’s dao and the limits of philosophy” *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi* (1996) (pp. 127-151)
- David Wong: “Zhuangzi and the obsession with being right” (2005)

Lecture Two: Zhuangzi and Mysticism

- Harold Roth: “Bimodal mystical experience in the Qiwulun 齊物論 Chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子”, *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi* (2003) (pp. 15-32)
- Brook Ziporyn: “How many are the ten thousand things and I? Relativism, mysticism, and the privileging of oneness in the ‘Inner Chapters’”, *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi* (2003) (pp. 33-63)

*Week Nine*

Lecture One: Zhuangzi on Grief and Death

- Chris Fraser: “*Xunzi* versus *Zhuangzi*: Two approaches to death in classical Chinese thought” (2013)
- Amy Olberding: “Sorrow and the sage: Grief in the *Zhuangzi*?” (2007)

**Unit Four: Legalism**

Lecture Two: Introducing Han Feizi

- Han Feizi: “The Han Feizi”, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2001) (pp. 295-346)
- Background reading (optional): Bryan Van Norden: “Han Feizi”, *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2000) (pp. 186-201)

**⇒ Paper Three Draft Due**

*Week Ten*

Lecture One: Han Feizi and Self-Cultivation

- Philip Ivanhoe: “Hanfeizi and moral self-cultivation” (2011)

Lecture Two: Wrapping Up

- No new reading.

**⇒ Peer Feedback Due**

**⇒ Revised Paper Three Due**

## CAMPUS RESOURCES

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- Campus Assault Resources and Education (CARE): <https://careprogram.ucla.edu/>
- Center for Accessible Education (CAE): <https://cae.ucla.edu/>
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): <https://counseling.ucla.edu/>
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Office: <https://equity.ucla.edu/>
- Student Conduct Code: <https://deanofstudents.ucla.edu/student-conduct-code>
- Writing Center: <https://uwc.ucla.edu/>